

5. Items to bring for a Baptism traditionally provided by the Godparent:

- * The Baptismal Gown or attire, new undershirt and if an infant, a new diaper (diaper provided by parent)
- * One small bottle of Olive Oil
- * One bar of soap
- * Two small white hand towels
- * One white crib size sheet (used by Godparent, which is opened in the Godparent's arms, to receive infant after the priest has performed the immersing phase of the ceremony)
- * One large white bath towel (used by Godparent, which is opened and placed on top of the opened sheet to receive infant after the priest has performed the immersing phase of the ceremony)
- * A cross and chain
- * One large and two small white candles (decorated or plain)
- * Parents should provide a separate towel or blanket (any color) to wrap the infant in after he/she has been undressed so that the Godparent can hold the infant before the priest performs the actual immersion of the Baptism.

6. Other Items traditionally brought to a baptism by parents or Godparents:

A. Martyrika(*) (Witness Pins): These are small lapel crosses handed out at the end of the ceremony and worn by guests as proof of witnessing the baptism. The traditional pin is made of white, pink or blue ribbon and features a tiny cross or icon in the center.

B. Boubounieres or candy favors(*): Boubounieres or candy favors is an Eastern Orthodox tradition over 3000 years old. These are almond candy favors given to each guest after the baptism by the parents or Godparents of the baptized child. Styles can range widely for these favors. Traditional favors are simple white, pink or blue puffs of tulle tied with a ribbon and filled with white Jordan almonds. The favors are given as tokens of good fortune and happiness. Boubounieres are symbolic of life with their bittersweet taste. The sugar coating represents the hope that life will be blessed with more sweetness than bitterness. The Boubounieres are always filled with an odd number of almonds.

7. The washing of the baptismal clothing, large towel and sheet:

A. The baptismal clothing, large towel and sheet contain Holy Oil on them. As such, the Holy Oil cannot be disposed of through a washing in a washing machine. The best way to wash the baptismal garment, undershirt, large towel and sheet is to do a wash by hand in a bucket with regular detergent and then pour the water outside in a garden or flower bed, not down a drain.

If a washing machine must be used then place a drain tube in a bucket and then dispose of the washing machine water in a garden or flower bed.

B. For the child's first bath after the baptism they should be bathed in a portable type of tub where the water can be disposed easily into a garden or flower bed.

8. Why do we use Olive Oil in a Baptism?

A. Olive Oil, not vegetable or any other oil is used to anoint the baptized individual into the Orthodox faith. The reason Orthodox Christians use olive oil is biblical and dates back to the time of Noah and the flooding of the earth. God flooded the earth and had Noah, a believer; build an arc, God was, in essence, baptizing the earth with the flood. After forty days, Noah sent out a dove that came back with a twig from an olive branch. The olive twig was a sign of mercy from God that he had saved Noah. Just as the olive healed and soothed Noah during the baptism of the planet, Orthodox Christians use the olive oil as a sign of grace to the newly anointed. It symbolizes the catechumen being clothes in Christ.



9. Communion after the Baptism:

A. The Godparent must bring the newly baptized baby/adult to church for three Liturgies to receive communions after the baptism. Ideally, communion is taken consecutively the first three Sundays after the baptism. The baptismal candle is brought as well and lit in the Narthex, and brought up to the altar with the baby/adult as well. If Godparent lives out of town and is unable to bring the child for communion, then it is the responsibility of the parents to bring the child. We bring the child 3 times remembering the Holy Trinity, as well as teaching the Godparent and parent that constant involvement in our Orthodox faith models your faith through your actions, in preparing and guiding the child in its spiritual path with Christ.

B. Special Note: The Godparent should carry the child on the right side of his/her body as he/she approaches the altar. If there are two Godparents, one should carry the baby and the other hold the candle. At the time of communion, the Godparent should provide the priest with the baptismal name of the baby right before the baby accepts communion.

PLEASE NOTE(*): Certain practices change from Orthodox Jurisdiction to Orthodox Jurisdiction, country to country or region to region. Each Orthodox Jurisdiction may have their own tradition or practice.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the Greek Orthodox Church



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Holy Baptism

Holy Baptism is the first of seven Sacraments in the Orthodox Christian Church. Together with the Sacrament of Holy Chrism it joins the candidate to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Some people argue that the only valid baptism is that of an adult who believes in Christ first. They argue that to baptize a helpless infant only a few weeks old who is unable to believe is meaningless. So why baptize a baby when it doesn't know yet what is happening? Why not wait for the baby to grow and believe in Christ and ask for baptism? If we were to follow this line of reasoning, we wouldn't inoculate the baby against diphtheria until he grows up and asks for it! But we know better. Baptizing infants before they know what is going on is an expression of God's great love for us. It shows that God loves us and accepts us before we can ever know and love Him. It shows that we are wanted and loved by God from the very moment of our birth. Nothing shows the nature of God's grace more than infant baptism. The Orthodox Church does not belittle personal faith in an adult who seeks baptism, but instead insists that the whole emphasis of baptism is not on what the baby does or the parents or the godparents, but on what God does. The fact that we are Christians is not due to any act on our part; it is due to the act of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Of course Baptism demands a personal response on the part of the baptized child when it reaches the age of reason. The child must accept what God did for him or her in Baptism. Baptism is not a divine pass that will get us into Heaven automatically. It must be followed by a personal awareness or awakening to the many gifts of God's love bestowed upon us through this great sacrament.



1. What age should a person be baptized?

The sooner the better so that they can participate in the life of the Church and take Holy Communion. Ideally in an Orthodox baptism, a child should be baptized between 40 days and 12 months. The older the child gets of 1 year of age, he or she can become too strong willed and make it more difficult for the priest to perform the baptism. Unless there is an imminent health crises, a child is not baptized before he or she receives the 40 day blessing. However, the Orthodox church encourages young baptisms in case, God forbid, there is a life threatening illness

or premature nature, that there is no life expectancy. There is no age limit on when a child or adult can be baptized. The Orthodox church welcomes anyone into the church at any age. The ceremony of the immersion will be adjusted based on the age of the child or adult so that it is appropriate.

2. Guidelines for the Godparents sponsoring a baptism by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.

A. The sponsor (Godfather or Godmother) must be an Orthodox Christian. If the sponsor is married, the marriage must have been blessed by an Orthodox priest.

B. In some cases the parents request a “non-Orthodox” person serve as an “honorary godparent” for their children. The Church does not permit honorary godparents. Perhaps, close friends may be considered as “aunts” or “uncles” this identifies them as being a part of one’s family.

3. Paperwork required for an Orthodox baptism.

A. For the Godparent:

* A copy of his/her Ecclesiastical Marriage Certificate, if applicable.

* A copy of his/her Ecclesiastical Divorce, if applicable.

* A copy of his/her Baptismal Certificate or Letter from the parish priest where they are as member in good standing.

B. Application for Baptism or Chrismation. This will include information in what parish you were married and by what priest. Also selection of a chosen Greek Orthodox Christian name of a saint (if the legal name is not a Christian name of a saint, a baptized name must be chosen). No nicknames or secular names can be used.

4. During the Baptism:

A. The ceremony normally commences in the Narthex of the church where the Godparent is holding the infant and stands as the sponsor of the infant, by giving the prescribed denunciations of Satan and affirmations of accepting CHRIST, and who recites the CREED signifying the personal belief of the candidate to Baptism. The name of the child is given at that time by the Godparent. After this segment is completed, the Priest, Godparent and infant walk toward the altar of the church where the actual baptism will take place.

B. At that time the child is undressed, normally by a grandmother, aunt or close friend and then wrapped in a blanket or towel and given back to the Godparent. In the case of a husband and wife as Godparents, the priest may allow the second party to take part in the

ceremony by assisting to hold the infant. Normally Godparent who takes part in the catechesis anointing the infant with the blessed oil before Baptism (*).

C. Once the priest has baptized the infant, he/she is placed back in the arms of the Godparent. Before this is done, the Godparent prepares themselves for receiving the infant with the oil sheet and towel. The sheet is opened in the Godparents arms and then the large white towel is opened and placed on top of the sheet.

D. The infant is then given to a designated individual to dress him/her in their baptismal gown. Once dressed the infant is brought back to the baptismal font and is given back to the Godparent/Godparents.

E. With the Godparent holding the child, the child is then tonsured. (A cutting of the hair in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit.)

F. Towards the end of the ceremony, the Godparent holds the infant and they take their first walk together in Christ around the font. Candles are held and traditionally family members such as small brothers or sister or aunts and uncles may hold the candles.

G. During the entire ceremony, it is customary that the parents of the infant remain sitting in the front of the altar of the church(*). At times, the infant may cry, which is very normal. However, this day is the day that is special for the Godchild and Godparent. It is the day when the bonding is established between the Godchild and Godparent introducing the infant to Christ and the Orthodox Church.

H. After the baptismal service is finished, the Godparent delivers the child into the arms of the mother with the father, in front of the congregation. As the mother and father receive the child, now baptized, sealed and illuminated, they both kiss the hand of the Godparent as a token of the spiritual relationship that is established between the Godparent/s and the family. This is a Christian expression of gratitude and respect. Another tradition has the parents and godparent(s) kiss one another on both cheeks. This is the kiss of peace in Christ.

I. After the Baptism, the Godparent should arrange with the parents to bring the newly baptized (infant, child or adult) to Holy Communion for three consecutive Divine Liturgies at any Orthodox Christian Church. The baptismal candle that was used in the ceremony should be brought to the church with the infant for the 3 times. The candle should be brought forward and lit each of the 3 times. If the Godparent lives out of town and is not able to bring the infant for the other 3 times for Holy Communion, it is the parents responsibility to complete this task.